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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001965

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: HEBRON: 450 SETTLERS IN THE CENTER OF A  
PALESTINIAN TOWN

REF: JERUSALEM 1646

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Hebron settler spokesman David Wilder led Poloff on a September 7 three hour tour of downtown Hebron. Hebron's 450 settlers (plus 250 yeshiva or religious school students) are known for their disruptive presence in the center of a large Palestinian city. Wilder told Poloff that Hebron's Jewish residents are living a biblical dream and will not leave without a fight. END SUMMARY

450 Settlers: Little Public Support  
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¶2. (C) Hebron has 450 Jewish settlers (plus 250 yeshiva students). Of that number, 140 are under six years old, and about 50 are U.S. citizens. The settlers occupy four enclaves -- Tel Rumeida, Beit Hadassa, Beit Romano, and Avraham Avinu. Poloff visited Hebron with the settlers' spokesman, David Wilder, on September 7. Wilder has lived in Hebron for 13 years and described the Machpela Cave, also known as the Tomb of Abraham or the Ibrahimi mosque, as "the reason we are all here."

¶3. (C) Wilder said the GoI controls 20 percent of Hebron (H2), but the settlers only occupy 3 percent of that (the four enclaves off Shuhada Street) and cannot expand. The IDF, he opined, is in downtown Hebron "spreading their lies" about the settlers. He said Hebron's settlers, however, "found ways" to immediately house the two families whom the IDF evacuated in August from the closed wholesale market and described how settlers poured cooking oil, flour, and water onto IDF troops conducting the operation (reftel). At each settlement enclave Poloff visited, Wilder pointed out vantage points in the nearby hills of Hebron's PA controlled H1 area and described the sniper threat to settlers, noting that a bullet came through his kitchen window missing his daughter's head "by a foot."

Shuhada Street  
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¶4. (C) Poloff drove down Shuhada Street (King David Street to the settlers), which was formerly a Palestinian commercial center in Hebron, but is now full of shuttered store fronts. (Note: Shuhada Street and the Palestinian commercial buildings along it were refurbished in 1997 by USAID at a cost of \$2 million following the signing of the Hebron Protocol. End Note) Poloff observed a Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) group, a Breaking the Silence (Israeli NGO) advocacy group, IDF troops, settler youth and a few Palestinians on the street. (Note: Palestinians may not drive vehicles on Shuhada Street. Palestinian pedestrians must cross a checkpoint at the end of Shuhada Street from

PA-controlled H1. End Note)

Tel Rumeida: "Trying to Stay Alive"

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15. (C) At Tel Rumeida, on the hill above Shuhada street, PolOff saw several caravans and one permanent structure, where 18 families live. Wilder said Abraham had purchased this land from the Hittites and it now houses the widow of Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anan, who was killed by a Palestinian intruder in August 1998, and a torah study center, whose construction PM Netanyahu authorized after the rabbi's murder. Wilder said the Biblical Patriarch Abraham purchased this land "legally," which entitles modern settlers to it. He acknowledged the disheveled state of archaeological excavations begun at Tel Rumeida in 1998 and said, "we're just trying to stay alive".

Beit Hadassah: "We Were Here First"

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16. (C) In Beit Hadassah, which has about 30 families and a yeshiva of 250 students, Poloff saw a museum dedicated to the 1929 massacre of 67 Jews in Hebron and counted five Israeli tour groups viewing the photos, tombstones, and historic storyplates. Wilder said the museum was created "to prove that we were here first" and claimed that Hebron had 500,000 visitors last year.

Avraham Avinu: "Some of Us Wouldn't Leave Here Alive"

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17. (C) At his Avraham Avinu office, which is filled with photos of murdered Jewish Hebronites, Wilder discussed

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Israeli-Palestinian politics and told PolOff that "we don't have plans to leave here." If there is a forced evacuation, Wilder said, "some of us would not leave here alive." Noting the international meeting planned for November, he said "if America tries to shove peace down our throats in November by acquiescing to Arabs, it will come back to hit you so hard, September 11 will look like a walk in the park." Wilder noted that the U.S. has nine towns named Hebron and asked, "Can you imagine what would happen if Jews were prevented from buying property in Hebron, Ohio?" He called PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) "a terrorist who knows how to put on a suit" and said "everybody knows that our friend the murderer Marwan Barghouti will be the next Palestinian president."

WALLES